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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 000639

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [ML](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN MALI POLICE BLOTTER: ONE CARJACKING AND
TWO DRUG DEALS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00414

[1](#)B. 07 BAMAKO 00960

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(U) There were two clashes between alleged drug smugglers in northern Mali during the weekend of July 4, and one vehicle belonging to a USAID contractor Geekcorps was car-jacked. Bandits stationed along the road from Gao and Timbuktu, between the villages of Temera and Bourem, car-jacked the Geekcorps 4x4 on the morning of July 1. The bandits escaped with the vehicle and CFA 1.3 million (about USD 3,000) in project money. None of the six Geekcorps employees in the vehicle were harmed, although they were left to walk 15 kilometers to the nearest village to obtain help. No USAID employees or American citizens were traveling with the vehicle. The Malian authorities have been notified and there are some reports placing the stolen vehicle near the village of Almoustarat. It is unclear whether the hijackers were Tuaregs, Arabs, or members of another ethnic group.

2.(C) During the weekend of July 4 there were two reported clashes between drug runners and Tuareg "rebels" in the region of Kidal along the Algerian frontier. The first incident occurred near the town of In Khalil and pitted a group of Arab and Tuareg traffickers against Tuaregs led by another well-known trafficker turned part-time rebel, Merzouk ag Acherif (see Ref. A). Two individuals were reportedly killed during the skirmish and negotiations between the traffickers and Merzouk continue.

3.(C) A separate incident involving traffickers and Tuaregs loyal to Ibrahim Bahanga occurred east of Kidal, near the frontier with Niger. A group of Bahanga's men led by Rhissa Doudou - member of the same Tuareg Ifergoumessen fraction as Bahanga - working with Kounta Arabs ambushed several Berabiche drug traffickers carrying as much as CFA 200 million (USD 475,000). Northern contacts report that subsequent negotiations between the Berabiche traffickers, Doudou and allied Kounta Arabs resulted in a three-way division of the cash.

4.(C) Comment: Clashes over guns, drugs and enormous sums of cash in northern Mali are not unusual. Unlike some previous northern Malian drug deals gone bad (Ref. B), there are no indications that any rogue members of the Malian security forces were involved in last week's incidents. Carjacking of four wheel drive vehicles, particularly along the road between Gao and Timbuktu, is also not uncommon although this is the first USAID partner vehicle stolen in 2008. These incidents do not necessarily indicate an up-tick in insecurity the north (and are all covered in existing consular caution and warning messages). Rather, they serve as a reminder of (1) the difficulties of policing such a vast and sparsely populated zone; and (2) that for many Tuareg

"rebels" like Merzouk and Doudou, harassing the Malian military is a part-time diversion from their full-time job trafficking drugs, guns and contraband across the Sahara.
LEONARD